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INFLUENCE OF METHOD OF QUESTIONING UPON CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO HUMOROUS SITUATIONS IN LITERATURE.

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DESCRIPTORS- *QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES, *CRITICAL READING, *READING INTERESTS, *LITERATURE APPRECIATION, *GRADE 5, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON,

TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF METHODS OF ELICITING CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO HUMOR IN LITERATURE AND TO DETERMINE HOW THESE RESPONSES ARE AFFECTED BY SEX, SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL, INTELLIGENCE, AND READING ABILITY, 365 FIFTH GRADERS WERE ASKED TO READ EXCERPTS CONTAINING ELEMENTS OF FIVE TYPES OF HUMOR. UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES REQUIRING WRITTEN EXPLANATIONS OF WHAT WAS FUNNIEST ABOUT THE STORY AND STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES REQUIRING RESPONSES TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE AND TRUE-FALSE ITEMS WERE DISTRIBUTED RANDOMLY TO THE CLASSES. RESULTS INDICATED THAT CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT SEXES, SOCIOECONOMIC LEVELS, INTELLIGENCE, AND READING ABILITIES RESPONDED DIFFERENTLY TO VARIOUS FORMS OF QUESTIONING ABOUT HUMOR IN LITERATURE. CHILDREN OF HIGH INTELLIGENCE MORE OFTEN JUDGED SELECTIONS HUMOROUS, AND CHILDREN OF HIGH SOCIOECONOMIC LEVELS AND THOSE OF HIGH READING ABILITIES MADE SIMILAR CHOICES OF TYPES OF HUMOR. SELECTIONS WERE MORE FREQUENTLY JUDGED HUMOROUS IN STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES THAN IN UNSTRUCTURED FORMS BY MORE BOYS THAN GIRLS, BY CHILDREN OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC LEVELS, AND BY CHILDREN OF LOW AND AVERAGE READING ABILITIES. THESE FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT RESPONSES TO HUMOR IN LITERATURE ARE INFLUENCED BY THE METHOD OF QUESTIONING. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 6-10, 1968). (NS)

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AERA Chicago

Paper delivered at annual meeting of
American Educational Research Association

February, 1968

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Background

A number of attempts have been made to determine the kinds of books which children find most appealing. Little has been done, however, to learn which characteristics of books influence the judgment of the reader. Studies have typically asked children to make a choice between two books, to judge a book as "good" or "poor", or to make a judgment on a scale ranging from "very interesting" to "not interesting". A very few investigators have asked readers to indicate which characteristics of a book make it enjoyable.

A problem basic to the investigation of children's reading interests is the need for an effective and efficient means of gathering and analyzing data. The problems in data collection are increased by the addition of questions related to specific qualities of books. Those problems are further compounded when individuals are asked to read the material and react to it in writing. From the standpoint of reading guidance, however, it is necessary to learn which qualities of books are important to children.

Studies done by Norvell (1958), Huber (1928), Malchow (1937), Kangley (1938), Wells (1934), and Landau (1955) have pointed to humor as a basis for children's interest in books. The present study used a theoretical framework of humor for a delineation of the types of humor frequently found in children's books. The framework provided a basis for choice of selections and for the construction of an instrument for gathering data.

RE 001 160

The purposes of this study were to investigate the effectiveness of several methods for eliciting children's responses to humor in literature which they read silently and to investigate the kinds of responses made by children of different sex, intelligence, socioeconomic, and reading level groups.

Procedure

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Procedure

The sample was comprised of six hundred thirty-five fifth graders enrolled in twenty-six classes randomly selected from the fifth grade

classes of a large city school system. Classrooms used in the study were chosen by means of a stratified random sample based on socioeconomic level.

Reading comprehension scores from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and scores from the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Tests were used to establish reading ability and intelligence groups. Children whose reading scores in September were below 3.5 were dropped from the sample because of the reading problems involved in the method of collecting data.

An instrument was constructed for use in the study. Five basic types of humor were identified from theoretical considerations of humor. They were: 1) laughter at a character, 2) laughter at a surprising or unusual happening, 3) laughter at an impossible happening, 4) laughter at words, and 5) laughter at a ridiculous situation. Seven excerpts containing elements of these types of humor were selected from literature for children. Two of the excerpts were from books of realism and five from books of fantasy. Excerpts varied in length from 64 to 536 words. Analysis of reading difficulty of the selections, using two different formulas, indicated that no excerpt was of greater reading difficulty than early fourth grade level. The excerpts were reproduced directly from the books, by permission of the publishers, by means of Xerox and ditto. Each child who participated in the study read the excerpts himself.

A questionnaire for eliciting responses to the excerpts was developed in four forms. On all of the forms, children were first asked whether they had previously read the book from which the selection was taken. They were then asked to judge whether or not the excerpt was funny. If a child said that a given excerpt was funny, he was asked to respond to other questions about the selection. One form of the questionnaire required the children to respond in an unstructured situation. They were asked to write, in their own words, what was funniest about the story. The extent to which method of questioning involves the subjects' use of language, writing, and spelling skills must be considered as a potential influence on the response made to that form.

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The structured forms required that children respond to true-false or multiple-choice items. The study was designed so as to minimize the imposition of adult bias in the formation of response options. The structured forms were constructed from responses made by a pilot

group to the unstructured questionnaire. Responses were read by four judges and each response was classified according to the five categories of humor chosen for the study. Those responses which could be classified with high judge agreement (in most cases 100 per cent) were considered for use in preparing the structured forms. The structured questionnaire for a given excerpt was comprised of four or five statements, each one representing a type of humor evident in the excerpt. Excerpts from realism were represented by four rather than five statements, excluding laughter at the impossible.

The multiple-choice forms required the reader to indicate the funniest statement about the story. The variation of the true-false form required the reader to make a judgment about each statement, indicating whether it represented an amusing facet of the story. Subjects responding to the true-false form were also asked to indicate the one statement which was most amusing.

The four forms of the questionnaire were distributed randomly within each classroom. Responses to the unstructured form were read by four judges and classified according to the five types of humor under consideration. Analysis of responses to the three structured questionnaire forms indicated that they did not differ significantly. Therefore, responses to the three forms were combined for the analysis of data.

The chi-square statistic was used for analysis of data in the study. A test of the independence of three classifications was used to test the significance of the difference between the number of children within groups who judged an excerpt humorous. The three classifications considered were: structured or unstructured treatment group; positive or negative response to the humor in the excerpt; and sex, intelligence, reading, or socioeconomic group. Comparisons were made separately for each story.

The two-dimensional chi-square statistic was used to test the significance of the difference between the number of children within groups who chose each of the categories of humor represented in a story.

Findings and Conclusions

Analysis of responses by sex groups indicated that three of the excerpts were judged humorous by a greater percentage of girls than boys. The last excerpt presented to the subjects was judged humorous

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Findings and Conclusions

Analysis of responses by sex groups indicated that three of the excerpts were judged humorous by a greater percentage of girls than boys. The last excerpt presented to the subjects was judged humorous by a greater percentage of girls in the unstructured sample and a greater percentage of boys in the structured sample.

Analysis of the responses made by Low, Middle and High intelligence groups indicated that a greater percentage of children in the High intelligence group than in the Middle or Low groups judged the selections to be humorous. Tests for the relationship of judgment of humor and treatment indicated that one excerpt was judged humorous by a greater percentage of Middle intelligence children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group. Analysis of the responses of Low and High intelligence groups to the last excerpt indicated that more children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group judged the selection humorous.

Investigation of responses by Low and Middle socioeconomic groups indicated that all of the selections except the first one were judged humorous by a larger percentage of children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group. There was a significant second order interaction for the first excerpt. The test for the relationship of judgment of humor and treatment group for children in the Low socioeconomic group was significant. A larger percentage of children in the structured sample than in the unstructured sample judged the selection humorous. The test for the relationship of judgment of humor and treatment for the Middle socioeconomic group was not significant. When responses made by Low and High socioeconomic groups were considered, three of the excerpts were judged humorous by a greater percentage of children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group. Investigations of significant second order interactions indicated that two of the selections were judged humorous by more Low socioeconomic children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group. Tests of the independence of the two classifications were not significant for the High socioeconomic group.

When responses of the Low and Middle reading level groups were considered, six of the seven selections were judged humorous by a larger percentage of children in the structured treatment group than in the unstructured treatment group. The one selection for which there was not a significant relationship between judgment of humor and treatment was the first selection presented to the children.

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The first choices of category of humor were analyzed for each selection. Comparison of choices made by boys and girls showed no significant differences for any selection. Differences in choices of children in the three socioeconomic groups were significant for three

selections. The larger percentage of each of the socioeconomic groups chose the same category for each selection. However, a considerably greater percentage of children in High group than in the Low or Middle groups chose that category. For nearly every selection, the greatest percentage of all reading groups and all intelligence groups chose the same category of humor.

The following conclusions are based on the analyses of children's responses to humor in a selection from literature:

1. Differences in the responses made by children in structured and unstructured treatment groups were greater for boys than for girls. Boys more frequently judged selections humorous when they were presented in a structured situation.

2. Differences in the responses of children in structured and unstructured treatment groups were greater for Low socioeconomic groups than for Middle or High socioeconomic groups. Children in Low socioeconomic groups more often judged selections humorous when they were presented in a structured situation.

3. A greater percentage of children in the Low and Middle reading groups judged excerpts humorous when they were presented in a structured situation than when they were presented in an unstructured situation.

4. Children in the High intelligence group more often judged excerpts humorous than did children in the Middle or Low intelligence groups.

5. There were few differences in the choices of categories of humor made by the groups studied. Significant differences in choices of humor among groups were most often explained in terms of the differences in patterns of group members rather than in terms of the category of humor in the selection chosen by the greatest percentage of members in each group.

6. Children in the High socioeconomic group and the High reading group were more alike in their choices of category of humor than were children in the other groups.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that there are differences in the way children of different intelligence, sex, socioeconomic, and reading level groups respond to various forms of questioning about

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Discussion

The results of the study indicate that there are differences in the way children of different intelligence, sex, socioeconomic, and reading level groups respond to various forms of questioning about literature. If there are differences in response patterns of children in Low socioeconomic areas to different forms of questions, as suggested by the study, it would be important to look more closely at methods

used in the teaching and testing of knowledge of literature. A greater percentage of Low socioeconomic children judged selections humorous when they were presented in a structured situation than in an unstructured situation. Similar trends were evident in responses made by children in Low reading and Low intelligence groups. Fewer positive judgments of humor in the selections were made by children who were asked to follow the judgment with a written explanation of the part of the story that was most humorous. When children were given, in structured form, a choice of kinds of humor in the selection, they did not show the same hesitancy to judge the selection humorous. Findings of the study suggest that boys' responses to humor in literature are influenced, in some cases, by the method of questioning. Boys more often judged a selection humorous when it was presented in a structured situation, requiring little or no writing on the part of the child.

The findings have implications for the construction of instruments for eliciting or evaluating children's responses to literature. If the responses made by boys and by children in Low socioeconomic, reading and intelligence groups are to be adequately assessed, it will be necessary to use a type of questionnaire which limits the interference of item form with type of response.

Excerpts were taken from the following books:

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Henry Huggins by Beverly Cleary. Copyright (c) 1950 by William Morrow and Company, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publishers.

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White. Copyright (c) 1952 by E. B. White. Reproduced by permission of the publishers, Harper and Row, Inc.

Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren. Copyright (c) 1950 by The Viking Press, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the publishers.

The Cricket in Times Square by George Selden, by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. Copyright (c) 1960 by George Selden Thompson and Garth Williams.

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The sample was comprised of six hundred thirty-five fifth graders

QUESTIONNAIRES

Unstructured Form

Henry Huggins, pp. 22-24

Name _____
(last) (first)
School _____

1. Have you read this story before? _____

2. Do you think the story is funny? _____

3. If you answered "yes" to question 2, tell what you thought was funniest about the story.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was there anything else that was funny?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Structured Form

Henry Huggins, pp. 22-24

Name _____
(last) (first)
School _____

1. Have you read this story before? _____

2. Do you think the story is funny? _____

3. If you answered "yes" to question 2, read each of the sentences below. Write a "1" beside the sentence you think is funniest. Write a "2" beside your second choice.

_____When Ribs started for the front of the bus and everything fell and the hose wrapped around the passengers.

_____When the lady dropped her bag of apples.

_____When Henry and his dog got on the bus.

_____When the fat man said, "Well, I'll be doggoned!"

_____I thought this part was funniest _____

_____

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Table 1

Percentage of Boys and Girls
in Structured and Unstructured Treatment Samples
Who Judged Each Selection Humorous

	Unstructured treatment		Structured treatment	
Selection	Boys N=90	Girls N=71	Boys N=221	Girls N=252
HENRY HUGGINS	76.67	81.69	87.33	92.46
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (escape)	51.11	69.91	66.51	76.59
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (policeman)	44.44	69.01	74.21	86.11
OWLS IN THE FAMILY	22.22	40.84	44.34	46.82
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE	36.67	43.66	65.61	62.30
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)	57.78	73.24	76.47	83.73
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)	47.78	66.20	85.07	76.98

Table 2

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment
of Humor in the Story, Treatment, and Sex in the Study of Judgment
of whether or not Excerpts Were Humorous

Excerpt	Judgment by treatment df=1[a]	Judgment by sex df=1[a]	Treatment by sex df=1[a]	Judgment by treatment by sex df=1[a]
HENRY HUGGINS	13.4760*	4.8633	4.0483	.0938
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (escape)	8.7933*	12.9327*	3.8565	1.1898
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (policeman)	38.4214*	19.9323*	3.5668	4.1435
OWLS IN THE FAMILY	10.8278*	2.9934	3.5668	4.1022
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE	27.4298*	.0016	3.5668	2.3710
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)	15.1121*	7.1346*	3.5668	1.5911
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)	38.7318*	.2225	8.7543	15.2615*

[a] * Chi-square .99 with 1 df is 6.63
Significant at the .01 level.

Table 3

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment of Humor and Sex
in Responses Made by Structured and Unstructured Treatment Groups
to PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)

	Judgment of humor by sex for unstructured treatment group		Judgment of humor by sex for structured treatment group	
	df=1[a]	Chi-square	df=1[a]	Chi-square
PIPPI LONGSTOCKINGG (burglars)		22.6461*		7.82964*

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Excerpt	Judgment by treatment df=1[a]	Judgment by sex df=1[a]	Treatment by sex df=1[a]	Judgment by treatment by sex df=1[a]
HENRY HUGGINS	13.4760*	4.8633	4.0483	.0938
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (escape)	8.7933*	12.9327*	3.8565	1.1898
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (policeman)	38.4214*	19.9323*	3.5668	4.1455
OWLS IN THE FAMILY	10.8278*	2.9934	3.5668	4.1022
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE	27.4298*	.0016	3.5668	2.3710
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)	15.1121*	7.1346*	3.5668	1.3911
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)	38.7318*	.2225	8.7543	15.2615*

[a]
* Chi-square .99 with 1 df is 6.63
Significant at the .01 level.

Table 3

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment of Humor and Sex
in Responses Made by Structured and Unstructured Treatment Groups
to PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)

	Judgment of humor by sex for unstructured treatment group df=1[a] Chi-square	Judgment of humor by sex for structured treatment group df=1[a] Chi-square
PIPPI LONGSTOCKINGG (burglars)	22.6461*	7.82964*

[a]Chi-square .99 for 1 df is 6.63
*Significant at the .01 level.

INFLUENCE OF METHOD OF QUESTIONING UPON CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO HUMOROUS SITUATIONS IN LITERATURE

Dianne L. Monson
University of Washington

Paper delivered at annual meeting of
American Educational Research Association

February, 1968

Background

A number of attempts have been made to determine the kinds of books which children find most appealing. Little has been done, however, to learn which characteristics of books influence the judgment of the reader. Studies have typically asked children to make a choice between two books, to judge a book as "good" or "poor", or to make a judgment on a scale ranging from "very interesting" to "not interesting". A very few investigators have asked readers to indicate which characteristics of a book make it enjoyable.

A problem basic to the investigation of children's reading interests is the need for an effective and efficient means of gathering and analyzing data. The problems in data collection are increased by the addition of questions related to specific qualities of books. Those problems are further compounded when individuals are asked to read the material and react to it in writing. From the standpoint of reading guidance, however, it is necessary to learn which qualities of books are important to children.

Studies done by Norvell (1958), Huber (1928), Malchow (1937), Kingsley (1938), Wells (1934), and Landau (1955) have pointed to humor as a basis for children's interest in books. The present study used a theoretical framework of humor for a delineation of the types of humor frequently found in children's books. The framework provided a basis for choice of selections and for the construction of an instrument for gathering data.

The purposes of this study were to investigate the effectiveness of several methods for eliciting children's responses to humor in literature which they read silently and to investigate the kinds of responses made by children of different sex, intelligence, socioeconomic, and reading level groups.

Procedure

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Studies done by Norvell (1958), Huber (1928), Malchow (1937), Kingsley (1938), Wells (1934), and Landau (1955) have pointed to humor as a basis for children's interest in books. The present study used a theoretical framework of humor for a delineation of the types of humor frequently found in children's books. The framework provided a basis for choice of selections and for the construction of an instrument for gathering data.

The purposes of this study were to investigate the effectiveness of several methods for eliciting children's responses to humor in literature which they read silently and to investigate the kinds of responses made by children of different sex, intelligence, socioeconomic, and reading level groups.

Procedure

The sample was comprised of six hundred thirty-five fifth graders enrolled in twenty-six classes randomly selected from the fifth grade

Table 7

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment of Humor in the Story, Treatment, and Middle and High Socioeconomic Levels in the study of Judgment of whether or not Excerpts Were Humorous

Excerpt	Judgment by treatment df=1[a]	Judgment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]	Treatment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]	Judgment by treatment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]
HENRY HUGGINS	.0004	.0036	.0276	4.3489
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (escape)	3.7867	.8189	.0330	3.8186
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (policeman)	26.2097*	20.9781*	.0424	2.2013
OWLS IN THE FAMILY	4.1044	4.6276	.1030	.2498
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE	9.2084*	1.8145	.0911	.3338
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)	.2741	1.2383	.3783	1.6607
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)	25.2098*	9.6685*	.0217	1.4914

[a] Chi-square .99 with 1 df is 6.63.
* Significant at the .01 level.

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Table 8

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment of Humor in the Story, Treatment, and Low and High Socioeconomic Levels in the Study of Judgment of whether or not Excerpts Were Humorous

Excerpt	Judgment by treatment df=1[a]	Judgment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]	Treatment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]	Judgment by treatment by socioeconomic level df=1[a]
HENRY HUGGINS	6.3364	.0114	.2133	.4652
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (escape)	2.1854	1.8596	.1336	2.3458
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (policeman)	21.3464*	2.3357	.1734	.5010
OWLS IN THE FAMILY	10.8233*	3.3130	.1734	.8847
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE	23.6161*	1.9624	.1167	7.3501*
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)	3.0698	1.5719	5.5791	6.8702*
PIPPI LONGSTOCKING (burglars)	37.7492*	5.0045	.1482	6.3288

[a] Chi-square .99 with 1 df is 6.63.
* Significant at the .01 level.

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Table 9

Chi-square Values for Tests of Independence of Judgment of Humor and Treatment Group for Responses Made by Low and High Socioeconomic Levels to CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize) and THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE

	Judgment of humor by treatment group for low socioeconomic level		Judgment of humor by treatment group for high socioeconomic level	
	df=1[a]	Chi-square	df=1[a]	Chi-square
CHARLOTTE'S WEB (prize)		7.5590*		.18772
THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE		28.9044*		1.4257

[a] Chi-square .99 with 1 df is 6.63.
* Significant at .01 level.